

Photographs of Prisoners of War, Showing their Condition when they reached the Union Lines.

The following letter will explain the photographs presented on the first page of this issue of the NATIONAL TRIBUNE:

WEST'S BUILDINGS HOSPITAL,
Baltimore, Md., May 24, 1864.

DEAR SIR: I have the honor to enclose the photograph of John Breinig, with the desired information written upon it. I am very sorry your committee could not have seen these cases when first received. No one, from these pictures, can form a true estimate of their condition then. Not one in ten was able to stand alone; some of them so covered and eaten by vermin that they nearly resembled cases of small-pox, and so emaciated that they were *really* living skeletons, and hardly that, as the result shows, forty out of one hundred and four having died up to this date.

If there has been anything so horrible, so fiendish, as this wholesale starvation, in this history of the satanic rebellion, I have failed to note it. Better the Massacres at Lawrence, Fort Pillow, and Plymouth than to be thus starved to death by inches, through long and weary months. I wish I had possessed the power to compel all the northern sympathizers with this rebellion to come in and look upon the work of the *chivalrous* sons of the hospital and sunny south when these skeletons were first received here. A rebel colonel, a prisoner here, who stood with sad face looking on as they were received, finally shook his head and walked away, apparently ashamed that he had held any relations to men who could be guilty of such deeds.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

A. CHAPEL.

Hon. B. F. WADE,
Chairman of Committee on the Conduct of the War,
Senate U. S.

Extracts from the Report on the Treatment of Prisoners of War by the Rebel Authorities.

The following are extracts from the Report of the Committee of the House of Representatives of the Third Session of the Fortieth Congress, appointed to investigate the treatment of prisoners of war by the rebel authorities, and also extracts from the testimony taken by the said Committee:

OBJECT AND PURPOSE OF THIS INVESTIGATION.

Impressed with the magnitude and importance of this work, the committee have endeavored to so perform it as to give to the House and the country a faithful and true official history of the wrongs and sufferings endured by the national soldiers and loyal citizens at the hands of the Confederate authorities. During and since the war investigations have been ordered with reference to individual cases of cruelty and responsibility, but the committee understood that the House, in ordering this investigation, intended that the whole subject should be carefully canvassed and a complete history collected while the facts were fresh in the memory of living men. And here it may be proper to pause to consider and answer the inquiry which has sometimes been raised as to the necessity and utility of this investigation. Why should it have been ordered; and what reasons are there for prosecuting these inquiries? What is to be gained by spreading before this country and the world a picture so terrible and an experience so sickening and loathsome in its details, mingled with so much crime and atrocity on the part of the responsible authors?

In the opinion of your committee, a neglect to place in official form and under official sanction a record of the Southern captivity of Union soldiers and citizens during the late war could not fail to occasion misconception and misapprehension in all time to come. The transient and somewhat fugitive histories, based on the personal experiences and observations of the authors, which have appeared from time to time, though truthful in character and interesting in narrative, can hardly be trusted to convey to future generations in living and permanent form the horrors of Southern prison life, though to the readers of the present day, to whom they are accessible, they furnish a startling tale of hitherto unknown suffering and brave endurance. But it may well be questioned whether these detached though numerous works are destined to live in the great future, or insure for themselves an extended historical reputation and existence. Their very number may hereafter serve to confuse the general reader, searching for some comprehensive history of this great era, and finally banish most of them from the libraries of the people, when the personal suffering or individual heroism which now lend them their interest and popularity shall have faded from the memory of friends. Yet, in a national and historical sense, the subject of rebel imprisonment, its fearful consequences to its victims, the causes in which it had its origin and development, and its bearing and influence on the civilization of the age, demand an enduring record, truthful and authentic, and stamped with the national authority.

Your committee feel assured that a perusal of the evidence and conclusions, which are now submitted as a result of their labors, will fully justify the ground here stated, while it will vindicate the motives which originated the investigation. They feel confident that such perusal will confirm the justice, as well as the importance, of preserving in official form the narratives of our suffering soldiers and fellow-citizens who were the victims of Southern captivity, and the evidence of the barbarous influences which led to the infliction of these indescribable horrors. They feel assured that the reader will be impressed with the conviction that these facts should live in history as the inevitable results of slavery, treason, and rebellion, and as an example to which the eyes of future generations may revert with shame and detestation. That history, preserved in official form, is due to the heroism of the thousands of long-suffering and martyred soldiers of the republic whose lives were sacrificed in the cause of liberty, and whose devotion should be cherished in the heart of the nation as an enduring example of that chivalric courage which elevates man above the common level of his race, and enables him to undergo the untold horrors of torture, starvation, and death, in vindication of principle and in the defense of his country. Its preservation is demanded as a condemnation of the appalling

fruits of a system of human slavery which trained its devotees to acts of cruelty at which the civilized world now stands aghast. It is demanded as a warning against the unholy ambition which pauses at the perpetration of no crime that serves to give it power and success; which breaks down the reason of man and shrouds in darkness the humanity of our nature, while it turns its bloody and unsparing hand to the destruction of country and mankind. This record should live in the archives of the nation as a warning to future generations, teaching them to avoid the terrible consequences which have arisen from the cherished institutions of slavery, culminating in the crime of rebellion and an abrogation of the rules of civilized warfare. Such a lesson must, in the very nature of things, teach posterity to avoid repetition of these causes and place it constantly on its guard to prevent a recurrence of the rebellion.

There is yet another reason why this investigation should have been entered upon and why the results should pass into the official history of the nation. The rebels and their sympathizers have infused into the public mind the idea that, while they were driven by destitution and the want of supplies to the fearful expedient of starving Union prisoners of war, the course of our Government upon the question of exchange was a willful neglect of the prisoners in their hands and a wanton disregard of the strongest dictates of duty and humanity toward the unfortunate victims of rebel barbarity.

Your committee are enabled, from the testimony of the witnesses examined, the contemporaneous history of the time, the official documents in the War Department, and the captured records of the late rebel confederacy, to present a full, complete, and convincing refutation of these excuses and charges. This assertion is made in the light of the recorded evidence to be found in the subsequent pages; and your committee may well congratulate the House and the country that justice, though tardy, is sure, and that the loyal administration of Abraham Lincoln, and the army and navy of the United States, are wholly and entirely exculpated from any responsibility for these great sufferings and crimes, while the evidence points with unerring finger to the highest as well as the subordinate officers of the confederacy as the great criminals, guilty of atrocities for which Wirz suffered on the gibbet, and for whose like punishment every principle of justice and violated law is to-day speaking in thunder-tones from the voices of history.

TREATMENT OF PRISONERS AT TIME OF CAPTURE.

In striking contrast with the uniform kindness of Union soldiers toward their captives taken in battle, was the treatment experienced by our officers and men immediately upon falling into the hands of the enemy. The harsh and brutal conduct of the rebels toward their unfortunate prisoners furnishes a constant and leading theme for the denunciation of the survivors. It commenced, usually, by unmanly jeers and taunts unworthy the character of a soldier, and undeserved by the heroic men who had been compelled to yield to the fortunes of war. This was followed by a rigid and humiliating search of clothing and person, sometimes taking place on the field of battle, sometimes postponed until the arrival of the captive at the first prison station. This search was renewed as often as the caprice or cupidity of the officer might dictate. Such searches were but the admonition of robbery. Surplus clothing, oftentimes necessary clothing, watches, money, everything of value, was seized and appropriated by the captors, and even the keepsakes of the soldiers were unrespected by these military robbers.

Pictures of wife and children, father or mother, brother or sister, of no value to the stranger, but inexpressibly dear to him who was to linger for months in hopeless confinement, were wantonly torn from their possession and made the subject of ribald jest and ridicule.

Well-organized governments regulate and settle the relations and difficulties between the citizens of their respective jurisdictions by public authority and will not use public power to wrong or rob individuals. All public property or contraband of war, found in possession of prisoners, should be seized by the captors on behalf of their government, but that which belongs to them, such as clothing and money, even if taken to prevent its improper use, should be returned again in good faith.

The United States Army Regulations of 1861, pages 107 and 108, provide as follows:

"745. Prisoners of war will be disarmed and sent to the rear, and reported as soon as practicable to the headquarters. The return of the prisoners from the headquarters of the army to the War Department, will specify the number, rank, and corps.

"746. The private property of prisoners will be duly respected, and each shall be treated with the regard due to his rank. They are to obey the necessary orders given them. They receive for subsistence one ration each, without regard to rank, and the wounded are to be treated with the same care as the wounded of the army. Other allowances to them will depend on conventions with the enemy."

Early in the war the enemy observed the idle ceremony of making a list of the property seized, professedly for safe keeping and restoration, but instances where any was returned are extremely rare. Even in the few cases where money was restored, confederate scrip, nearly worthless, was substituted dollar for dollar for the money of which the soldier had been robbed. It will be found that this practice met the severe animadversion of the inspecting officers of rebel prisons, but their recommendations for a change in its practice seem to have been entirely disregarded. It seems that after the second year of the war, even this formality was almost or entirely abandoned, and prisoners were not only robbed of money, surplus clothing, and valuables, but were often deprived of coats, shoes, and hats, and in many cases stripped of everything but shirt and drawers, until at last the rebel captor came to regard his Union victim as one who, even as a prisoner of war, had no rights which a rebel was bound to respect. The testimony will be found replete with instances of the actual truth of this assertion, evincing a spirit of fiendish cruelty shorn of all just regard for the rights of the living, as it was destitute of all respect for the persons of the dead.

This search and robbery of prisoners was sometimes accompanied by the most cruel violence. In the early part of the war the demand for the surrender of valuable articles was freely complied with, but after learning from the testimony of others the failure of the rebel authorities to make restoration of the property which had been given up, and learning the importance of having money and clothing

during captivity, efforts were naturally made by our men to conceal their valuables, before or after capture. The detection in these attempts was constantly followed by punishment of a cruel, and sometimes of a revolting character. Some of the most aggravated cases of beating and other personal violence were inflicted solely on account of this detection. The officers at Richmond, as shown by the testimony, became, by practice, specially expert in searching and robbing prisoners, and detecting concealment. During the year 1864 a system of re-searching was in vogue in all the prisons, so that our officers and men were compelled to run the gauntlet, and submit to the indignity of a new search at each transfer from prison to prison. These outrages, so clearly in direct violation of the laws of war, and in turpitude and crime so nearly akin to the robbery of the dead, necessarily increased the helpless condition of our soldiers, depriving them of the means of procuring the necessities and comforts which might otherwise have been attainable, and rendering them a more easy and facile prey to the disease and death which spread their sable pall over the prison houses of the South.

Nor was the immediate cruelty inflicted thus early upon the Union soldier confined to robbery and personal violence. Instant and long marches, short rations, scarcity of water, and transportation fit only for beasts destined for the shambles, were the common incidents of his early captivity. The facts disclose a cool and malicious disregard of the condition and comfort of the prisoners taken in battle, and an evident intention on the part of the confederate authorities to lose no time in the attempt to break them down in body and in spirit, and render them unfit for future service to their country. Men wounded in the arm or body were forced to make long marches, guarded by cavalry, and when unable longer to keep pace with the column, were beaten and cut with the sabres of their guard in order to force them forward until they fell by the roadside dead, where they were left unburied. Prisoners transported on railroads through the South were almost invariably packed into close box cars, the sick and well, the wounded and unwounded, from sixty to eighty huddled together in each car. These cars were often used for this purpose without cleansing, immediately after cattle had been taken out of them, and the excrement of the beast was the bed of the men. Insufficient guards were provided on such occasions, and the cars consequently kept closely shut, sometimes for several days in succession, the men not being allowed to leave them for any purpose. Such was the bitter and terrible preparation of the devoted soldier of the Union for his entrance into the charnel houses of Richmond and Andersonville.

The testimony shows the mode of search adopted, and the ingenuity with which concealments were made. The prisoners were stripped entirely naked and their clothes examined, sometimes by cutting and ripping such portions as were supposed to contain secreted money and other valuables. This was followed by an exploration of the person, every part of which was closely examined for articles of value. These were sometimes found secreted in the hair, whiskers, mouth, ears, nose, or other part of the prisoner's person. A detection was usually followed by severe punishment. Sometimes, at the time of exchange, a demand was made by the prisoners for the return of their money, but this was generally met with denunciation, and oftentimes with violence. This deliberate and systematic robbery of defenseless men was pursued at Richmond, within sight and hearing of the higher rebel officials, and not far from the residence of Jeff. Davis. Sounds of revelry and carousal at that seat of treason could be heard by these wronged, robbed, and outraged prisoners, as they lay on the bare floors of the buildings where they were confined, deprived by their inhuman captors of the barest necessities of life.

The transportation of prisoners in the crowded and suffocated condition which we have described, was not the result of any necessity. It was caused by no forced retreat from a battle-field or any emergency of a similar character but was the usual mode of transit of prisoners to and from stockades in the heart of the confederacy. So horrible was the sufferings endured in these journeys that every possible effort was made by the prisoners to escape from the cars while in motion, and many cases are noticed where, in the night, they succeeded in forcing open the door, or in cutting holes through the side of the car, and by that means attempting to escape, preferring to risk their lives in this forlorn hope rather than endure the tortures of travel. For many interesting recitals of these attempts, their failure or success, the reader is referred to the testimony of the witnesses. An instance of wanton cruelty occurred on the occasion of a squad of prisoners leaving Richmond, early on a winter's morning, who, after a night of snow and rain, were compelled to march through the middle of the streets, many of them barefooted, their feet bleeding from wounds occasioned by the roughness of the road.

With an honorable foe the rules of civilized warfare obtain, and when an enemy falls into his power, by capture or surrender, he seeks to alleviate his sufferings to the extent of his ability. He becomes for the time his friend and protector, as well as his captor. But such was not the usual practice of the officers and soldiers composing the rebel army; and here we have in this particular, as in many others, a striking contrast between the conduct of the opposing forces in the late war. As a writer has said: "The treatment of prisoners of war is a significant test of civilization in any people or nation. It is the one amenity that redresses a thousand violence engendered by belligerent relations, or it is the one cruelty that casts all others into the background. In proportion as we find a tribe or community advanced in human progress, we are prepared to expect a sympathy for the weak or defenceless, and it is only in barbarous or savage life that we look for the torture of unarmed men, or the abuse of non-combatants. Hence it is difficult to realize that a distinct and large portion of the American people should be chargeable with such enormities of prison maltreatment as have become matters of fact in history during four years of civil strife."

ANDERSONVILLE, OR CAMP SUMTER, SUMTER COUNTY, GEORGIA.

It seems fitting and proper that in the special description of rebel prisons, upon which this report is about entering, the spot on which during the terrible year of 1864 was concentrated the greatest amount of suffering the records of civilized warfare can present, and the name which, supplanting all others in our language, has passed into a synonym of the cruelty and atrocity of man, should first demand our attention. Andersonville was a representative prison. The mournful intetest which now centers in its history, and which must in the future attend the recital of its accumulated horrors, has impelled your committee to bestow upon its origin and progress, its